



The multiple aspects of aggression - a questionnaire study of aggression towards dogs and humans

Forkman, Björn; Meyer, Iben Helene Coakley

Published in:

1st Feline Science Forum, 4th Canine Science Forum, Companion animals j- human health and disease

Publication date:

2014

Document version

Early version, also known as pre-print

Citation for published version (APA):

Forkman, B., & Meyer, I. H. C. (2014). The multiple aspects of aggression - a questionnaire study of aggression towards dogs and humans. In D. S. Mills, K. Griffin, L. Hewison, L. Finka, K. Brady, & P. Sriphavatsarakom (Eds.), *1st Feline Science Forum, 4th Canine Science Forum, Companion animals j- human health and disease* (pp. 228). University of Lincoln.



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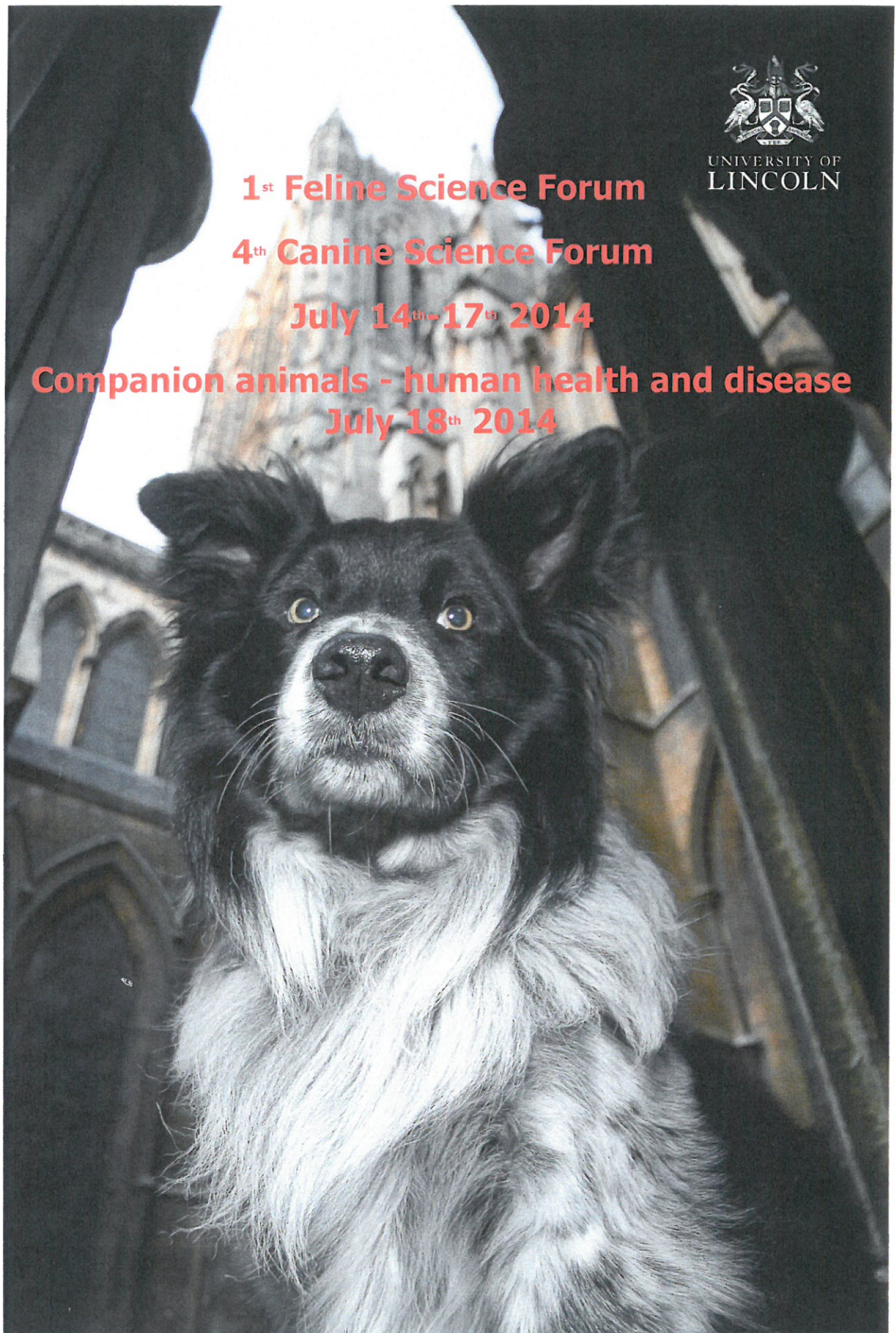
1st Feline Science Forum

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The multiple aspects of aggression – a questionnaire study of aggression towards dogs and humans

B. Forkman*, I.C. Meyer

Dept of Large Animal Science, University of Copenhagen, Grønnegårdsvej 8, 1870
Frederiksberg, Denmark

*bjf@sund.ku.kd

Aggression in dogs is a hotly debated subject, with a lively debate on breed specific aggression. Most studies on aggression use one of three approaches; the owner is asked if the dog has bitten another dog or a human, dogs who have been bitten are registered in e.g. veterinary clinics or the number of humans bitten are registered in e.g. hospitals. These methods yield very different pictures both of what breeds are most aggressive as well as which breeds are most likely to cause serious damage to the victim.

A questionnaire was sent out to a representative sample of the general population in Denmark, this was supplemented with the same questionnaire directed specifically to dog owners (4030 respondents in all of which were 2040 dog owners).

The highest percentage of dogs that were reported to have bitten another dog (over 15% of the dogs) were German shepherds, large mixed breed dogs, muscle dogs and Danish-Swedish farmdog (local terrier type), with Cairn terrier and Dachshund coming close to 15%. When asked if the bite had resulted in a need for treatment more than 4% of the owners of the large mixed breeds, the German shepherd and muscle dogs answered positively.

When asked if the dog had bitten a human so badly that he/she required treatment the three major breeds were muscle dogs (6%), beagle (4%) and Chihuahua (3%). Slightly lower were the percentages for Cocker spaniel (2%), small mixed breeds (1%), Dachshund (1%) and Golden retriever (1%).

When discussing dog attacks, unprovoked attacks by strange dogs are often perceived as being the major problem. In this study these types of attacks were described as attacks that resulted in treatment of the bite being necessary, happened when the dog was off leash, the dog did not show any signs of fear, submission or flight, with the attack happening in public, and the dog not being the owner's or family's dog. Only 13 of the 4030 respondents answered that they had been the victim of such an attack. Four of these attacks were by small dogs (Dachshund to Cocker spaniel size) and nine by large dogs (Labrador sized dogs).

The breeds that bite other dogs are only the same that cause serious damage to humans to a limited extent. There is much less variation in frequency of biting between breeds than there is in serious damage to other dogs. There is very little overlap between breeds that cause serious damage to other dogs and to humans.